

Our Planet

United Nations Environment Programme

September 2014



Small Island Developing States



Emanuel Mori
Restoring a Safe
Climate

Freundel Stuart
From Potential
to Realization

John Ashe
Seizing the
Moment

Wu Hongbo
Island Voices,
Global Choices



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Reflections



Photo: Shutterstock



Achim Steiner

United Nations Under-Secretary-General and UNEP Executive Director

This year, 2014, was chosen as the International Year of Small Island Developing States in recognition of the need to see the escalating environmental crises facing these countries as a global challenge.

How small island developing states (SIDS) respond to threats such as sea level rise, freshwater scarcity and biodiversity loss, and the degree of support they receive, is indicative of how we, collectively, will adapt to a host of climate change impacts in the coming decades.

The world's 52 SIDS boast a variety of endemic species, biodiversity and indigenous knowledge that make them mainstays of our planetary ecosystem.

SIDS produce less than one per cent of global greenhouse gases, yet they are highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, including coastal erosion, coral bleaching, ecosystem

destruction, and adverse effects on crops and fisheries. SIDS are also disproportionately affected by natural disasters. The cumulative cost of disasters to SIDS' economies over the past two decades has been as high as 90 per cent of GDP, reversing years of development gains.

Climate-change-induced sea level rise in SIDS continues to be the most pressing threat to their environmental and socioeconomic development. Under the latest IPCC scenarios for a global average temperature increase of approximately 4° Celsius, sea level rise could be as much as one metre by 2100, a scenario that would affect almost 30 per cent of the population of SIDS living in areas less than five metres above sea level.

It is hoped that the new international climate change agreement currently being negotiated, and which will be adopted at the Paris conference in 2015, might help to relieve SIDS of

The environmental threats facing SIDS are the same ones that are facing us all. But larger economies, due to their scale, can better mask the impacts of exhausting their natural capital than smaller ones.



some of the economic burden of adapting to the impacts of climate change, while also reducing the severity of the impacts on SIDS by reducing global greenhouse gas emissions. But we should not look at climate change threats in isolation from other anthropogenic ones, because climate change is exacerbating existing problems such as desertification, biodiversity loss, and food insecurity.

Take the degradation of marine ecosystems as an example. A number of studies show that it is overfishing that outweighs all other human impacts on marine ecosystems, including climate change.

With SIDS accounting for 7 out of 10 of the world's countries most dependent on fish and seafood consumption, reducing emissions alone will not be enough to ensure that SIDS will have a sufficient supply of fish in the future. The environmental threats facing SIDS are the same ones

that are facing us all. But larger economies, due to their scale, can better mask the impacts of exhausting their natural capital than smaller ones. However, if economic growth continues at the expense of our natural environment, we will all feel the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation as acutely as the people of SIDS are feeling them now.

Solutions to these threats that preserve the business-as-usual economic models that have brought SIDS to the state of economic and environmental fragility they are in today will be temporary at best, and catastrophic at worst.

That is why SIDS are beginning to take the first steps on a blue-green economy transition that will build their resilience to the impacts of climate change, and move their economies forward—sustainably and inclusively. The energy sector, where SIDS are leading the switch to renewables, is a prime example of necessity

driving innovation and change. The cost of oil imports and debt servicing of up to 70 per cent of GDP has left SIDS highly vulnerable to fuel price fluctuations. On average, Pacific island households spend approximately 20 per cent of their household income on energy.

Many SIDS are now pursuing domestic renewable energy sources, such as solar and wind, for a more sustainable power production system. Through the Sustainable Energy For All initiative, SIDS are undertaking expansion of their renewable energy sector and, by 2030, they should increase the deployment, penetration, and efficiencies of renewable sources using existing cost-effective technologies.

The governments and people of SIDS will reiterate their commitment to sustainable economic growth at the Third International Conference on SIDS, taking place in September in Samoa. What they are calling for are resources and support to act on that commitment on a scale that will radically change their fortunes.

In support of this call to action, UNEP is producing the *Guidance Manual on Valuation and Accounting of Ecosystem Services for SIDS* and the *Global Environmental Outlook Report for SIDS*, both of which make clear that the responsible management of natural assets directly benefits the economy and is the cornerstone of sustainable socioeconomic development.

Building the momentum for the transition of SIDS to a blue-green economy requires a substantial redirection of investment to increase the current level of public and private sector flows to key priority areas. SIDS have a crucial role to play in this transformation. From valuing and managing their natural resources, such as fisheries, to putting the right incentives in place to allow the switch to renewable energy, each island state can advance its national sustainable development goals.

For the rest of the world, supporting SIDS on this journey of transition provides an unprecedented opportunity to be part of game-changing socioeconomic solutions that can be applied in broader contexts and bigger economies. In short, we should look upon SIDS as microcosms of our larger society, and not stand back and allow them to grapple with a threat that is, by and large, not of their own making. ▲

Emanuel Mori

Restoring a Safe Climate

Why HFCs should be phased down



Emanuel Mori
*President,
the Federated States
of Micronesia*

More than twenty years ago, my country's then-President, His Excellency Bailey Olter, addressed the first United Nations Conference on Environment and Development—the so-called, Earth Summit—held in Rio de Janeiro. Speaking on

signature. Several years later, at Kyoto, Japan, a protocol to the UNFCCC was adopted as a first step in setting global targets and timetables for reductions of greenhouse gas emissions, primarily those of carbon dioxide.

Without commenting on the many political considerations, it is fair to say that two circumstances have emerged in parallel since 1992 to present us with the dilemma that we face today. On the one hand—thanks to the diligence of our scientific colleagues worldwide and the evidence seen by our own eyes—we now know that climate change is no longer a debatable threat. It is happening, and its longer-term outcomes are increasingly predictable. On the other hand, bold speeches aside, the world has not yet found the political courage to take effective global

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